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His First Case



George Albert Drovín

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His First Case

A FARCE IN ONE ACT

By George Albert Drovín

Author of "In Hades," etc.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

BURTON COKE *A Young Lawyer*
DOROTHY RING *An Heiress*

COSTUMES

BURTON COKE, neat business suit.

DOROTHY RING, attired to suit the various characters she represents.

TIME IN REPRESENTATION, THIRTY MINUTES.

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His First Case

SCENE.—*Law office of BURTON COKE. Door in back, left of centre. Windows, R. and L. Desk, R., with office chair. Chair L. Typewriter on stand, R. of door. COKE discovered sitting in chair R., with feet on desk, reading a newspaper and smoking a pipe. After studiously examining the paper for a while, he puts it down, and continues smoking, thoughtfully.*

COKE. If the length of time a lawyer waits for his first case is any indication of his greatness, I ought to be famous, unless I starve to death in the interval. (*Thoughtfully.*) I am not a fool; I can reason clearly; and I know the law. Besides, I have the incentive of ambition to do my work well. Yet the public lack confidence in me. They object to my youth, as if youth were a crime. Well, that is a thing I will recover from, if I live long enough; but the immediate prospects of a recovery are very slight. I am likely to die before the cure is effected. (*Rising and pacing up and down.*) Oh, if I had just one big case I would show them what I could do! All I need is just a foothold on the ladder of fame, and I shall soon rise to the top, where riches and other pleasant things are to be found. Perhaps I shall find Miss Ring—Dorothy—at the top. Who knows? Now, isn't it annoying to love a girl to distraction and not to be able to tell her so, just because you are poor? Love is all very well in its way, but it is likely to be very much in the way when a fellow has no money. (*Knocking heard at the door.*) Hello! Who's that, I wonder? Come in!

(*Enter DOROTHY, disguised as a book-agent.*)

DOROTHY. I beg pardon; is Mr. Coke in?

COKE. I am Mr. Coke. What can I do for you?

DOROTHY. You can do a great deal for me, if you will. Indeed, I am sure you are just the man I want.

COKE. I do not think that you will have cause to regret your choice. Will you be seated?

(*She sits in chair, which he brings over to the desk from L. He sits at the desk.*)

DOROTHY. Thank you.

COKE. Now, just state your case as directly as possible.

DOROTHY. Well, you see, I am a poor girl and my landlord is a grasping fellow, who wants his rent promptly on the day it is due.

COKE. Ah, yes!

DOROTHY. I have no father; and my mother is ill, so I must support her.

COKE. Too bad!

DOROTHY. Therefore, I have taken to selling this book. (*Opens satchel, and takes out volume. COKE manifestly disappointed.*) It is called "Asylums I Have Inhabited," by E. P. Liptic.

COKE. Never heard of Liptic; who is he?

DOROTHY. Oh, he's an authority on mental disorders!

COKE. But, really, I have no possible use for such a book.

DOROTHY. It is very cheap, I am sure. It costs only a dollar down and a dollar every month for four months; and the book is yours right away.

COKE. But I am not interested in asylums.

DOROTHY. No; but you might be.

COKE (*aside; ruefully*). That's very true.

DOROTHY. Beg pardon?

COKE. I did not say anything.

DOROTHY. Oh, I thought you did.

COKE. No.

DOROTHY. No? I thought maybe you said that you would buy it.

COKE. But I don't want it. I have my professional books to buy, and they cost like h—— (*catching himself, just in time*)—hot-cakes.

DOROTHY. They ought to be cheap, then.

COKE. Well, this sort of hot-cakes is not. It is the very expensive kind. Look at this work, now (*taking volumes from top of desk*); I bought that at second hand and it cost me nine dollars.

DOROTHY. Nine dollars ! What wasteful extravagance ! You should not have done it. Now, had you bought my book, you would have saved money, besides owning a perfectly new copy. You see, it costs but five dollars—one dollar down, and one dollar a month.

COKE. But the work I have is useful to me in my profession ; yours is not.

DOROTHY. How do you know ? You might have a client in an asylum, some day ; and he might be in one of the asylums spoken of in this work ; and the keepers might not treat him well ; and you might be able to get your inside information from this book. (*With conviction.*) Oh, you can't tell ; you can't tell ! (*With energy.*) And think how cheap it is !

COKE. I am afraid the possibility is too remote. I cannot take it.

DOROTHY (*tearfully*). And I had counted on getting your order !

COKE (*rising*). I am sorry ; but you made a miscalculation.

DOROTHY (*weeping*). I have not taken an order to-day ; and I did so want to tell mother that I had made some money !

COKE (*disconcerted*). Don't cry. There, there ; for heaven's sake, don't cry so !

DOROTHY (*sobbing*). But—I—c—can't help—help it !

COKE (*opening his pocketbook and taking out bill*). Here ; here's five dollars to pay for the book. You may send me a copy. No doubt I shall find it useful.

DOROTHY (*joyfully*). Oh, thank you ; thank you ! I shall have it sent up this afternoon. (*Handing him a memorandum book.*) Just put your name and address in this book, if you please. (*He writes in book.*) That's it. Thank you. You have been very good to me. Good-morning !

(*Exit DOROTHY.*)

COKE (*looking after her*). Well ; of all things ! Confound these woman book-agents ! they would weep a fellow out of his last cent. Oh, I shall never succeed at the law ! I am too soft hearted. I am ; yes, I am. Now, I have paid five good dollars for something I do not want, and cannot use, just because she let loose the torrents of her sor-

row. (*Suddenly.*) I'll bet that was just a trick on her part ! But then a fellow can't see a girl cry, you know ; it doesn't do. The only way to dam those tears was to buy— (*Disgustedly.*) "Asylums I Have Inhabited" ! Now, wouldn't that give you the nightmare ! "Asylums"—well, I think that I am a fit candidate for one, myself. The next book-agent who comes here shall find that I am out ; or, if I cannot escape in that manner, she shall find that I already possess the particular work and edition that she has to sell. And I'll have it, too ; if only in my mind ! (*Knocking heard at door. Hurriedly sitting at desk.*) I wonder if that's another ? Come in !

(*Enter DOROTHY, disguised as a Salvation Army Lassie.*)

DOROTHY. Is this Mr. Coke ?

COKE. It is.

DOROTHY. I'm so glad.

COKE (*aside*). So am I. (*To her.*) Did you want to see me ?

DOROTHY. Of course.

COKE. Why, of course ! How absurd a question !

DOROTHY. Wasn't it ?

COKE. Yes, it was. Won't you be seated ?

DOROTHY (*sitting*). Thank you. Now, Mr. Coke, your name has been given me by one of your friends, as a man charitably inclined.

COKE (*aside*). Well, if I had that fellow here I would punch his head.

DOROTHY (*continuing*). And as a young lawyer, who is rapidly rising in his profession.

COKE (*aside*). That's a good reputation to have circulated ; but all my friends know better than that. (*With determination.*) Oh, he's a deep one ! Let me just get my hands on him !

DOROTHY. Therefore, I make bold to ask you for a small subscription in aid of our Home for Indigent Bums. It is a very worthy charity, designed to take care of tramps when they can no longer work at their profession.

COKE. I have no interest in tramps.

DOROTHY. But you should have. Just put yourself in their place.

COKE. That's just where I'll be, if people like you do not leave me in peace.

DOROTHY. Why, Miss Ring told me that you would help me!

COKE (*astonished*). Miss Ring?

DOROTHY. Yes.

COKE. Was she the friend who told you about my interest in tramps and such things?

DOROTHY. Yes.

COKE (*aside, and with resignation*). I see the marriage day fading off into the dim distance. (*To her.*) Well, if Miss Ring was the one who sent you here, of course I shall be glad to help you. Here (*again opening pocketbook and taking out note*); take this. It is all I have, at present. Very glad to oblige, I'm sure.

DOROTHY. How generous! Five dollars! You have done a noble work, sir; a noble work! (*Rising.*) Good-morning.

(*Exit DOROTHY.*)

COKE. That settles it! That is the end; the very end! The next woman who enters my office leaves it before she can state her business. I believe every woman in this confounded building is, under one guise or another, seeking charity. But no other need hope to find me willing to give faith to her story. That last bill was the last in very truth. (*Puts hand in trousers pocket, and takes out a few small coins.*) I have exactly twenty-five cents in change—all my available assets. Hardly enough with which to buy a decent lunch. Dorothy! Dorothy! Why did you get me into this scrape? (*Some one knocks at the door. COKE evidently does not hear it. Continuing.*) If you keep on at this rate, I shall never be able to ask you to marry me. (*Knocking continues. Woman's voice heard, "Anybody in?"*) Now that's another woman. I'll not let her in. (*Sits at a desk.*) Keep at it. I'll not hear you. (*Knocking continues. Writes. Knocking grows more vigorous.*) You'll get tired after a while. (*Rising impatiently, and rushing to the door.*) Confound you! What do you (*flinging it open*) want? (*Perceives DOROTHY without, in her own proper person. He is visibly embarrassed.*) Why, Miss Ring, this is an unexpected pleasure!

DOROTHY. It must have been, indeed. I am sure you kept me waiting long enough.

COKE (*embarrassed*). My fault, entirely.

DOROTHY. Of course it was.

COKE. Really, I cannot find words to express my regret.

DOROTHY. Are you sure you were not asleep?

COKE. Positive. Never more wide-awake in my life.

DOROTHY. Then you heard my knocking?

COKE. I was deeply absorbed in the intricacies of an important problem.

DOROTHY. How exciting!

COKE (*thinking of his rush to the door*). Yes; yes. (*Suddenly recollecting himself. Aside.*) What am I saying, anyhow?

DOROTHY. I was in the neighborhood, and thought I would stop in to see how you were fixed.

COKE. Now, that was handsome of you!

DOROTHY. I suppose you are very busy?

COKE. I have never worked harder than I have this morning. (*Aside.*) Which is the gospel truth.

DOROTHY. Just look at all those books! Do you have to study them all?

COKE. They are mostly books of reference—reports and digests, chiefly. By the way—speaking of digests—it is about lunch time, I think. You will surely come out to lunch with me?

DOROTHY. I shall be delighted.

COKE. Where do you prefer to go?

DOROTHY. I shall leave that entirely to you.

COKE. Suppose we go—— Great Scott! (*Aside.*) I entirely forgot that that confounded Salvation Army freak took my last note.

DOROTHY. Why, what's the trouble? Aren't you well?

COKE. Never felt worse in my life.

DOROTHY. Oh, dear! What shall I do? I hope you are not going to faint.

COKE. Never! That is one bad habit I have never acquired.

DOROTHY. Let me run for the doctor. (*Starts toward the door.*)

COKE (*stopping her*). Don't do that!

DOROTHY. But, what is it?

COKE (*aside*). There's nothing left for me to do but to tell her. Now, isn't this awful? (*To her.*) I suppose, Miss Dorothy, there is no way out of the matter, but for me to make a clean breast of the whole affair.

DOROTHY. I do not understand.

COKE (*with conviction*). But you will though, before I've finished. I was so overcome with pleasure at your unexpected visit, that I completely forgot that I had spent practically all my money this morning.

DOROTHY. But how were you going to eat?

COKE. Fortunately, my bunco steerers left me some small change; but not enough to buy a meal for two. (*Pulling out small change.*) That is all I have to tide me over Sunday. To-day being Saturday, the banks close at twelve o'clock, and it is now after that; so you see how awkward is my position.

DOROTHY. Tell me about it.

COKE. Well, there was a book-agent,—one of those awfully plain girls, you know. No style about her, and weepy eyes.

DOROTHY. Indeed!

COKE. Yes. She came in and cried all over the carpet, until I bought her book.

DOROTHY. You should not have done it.

COKE. I thoroughly agree with you.

DOROTHY. But why did you?

COKE. Because I was a fool, I suppose.

DOROTHY. And do you expect to make a living, or to keep a living you have once made, if you spend your money in that fashion?

COKE (*weakly*). No.

DOROTHY. And on a plain girl with weepy eyes,—oh, dear!

COKE (*warming up*). Well, I'm not to blame for her plainness!

DOROTHY (*with heat*). I didn't say you were.

COKE (*persistently*). But she was plain—awfully plain, almost homely.

DOROTHY (*in anger*). So you have said, several times. There is no need of this senseless repetition; suppose you change the subject.

COKE. Well, you wanted to hear about her.

DOROTHY (*still vexed*). I have heard about her—enough and to spare.

COKE (*blankly*). Well, I don't see why you make so much fuss about it.

DOROTHY (*recovering her temper*). Was that all? I believe you used the plural,—“bunco steerers.”

COKE. No; worse luck, that was not all. There was another,—a freak from the Salvation Army.

DOROTHY. A freak! You must have had a very interesting time!

COKE. Oh, I had!

DOROTHY. Was she, too, plain,—awfully plain, almost homely?

COKE. Well, her face was pushed so far back into her sunbonnet, that I really couldn't say.

DOROTHY. Why do you call her a freak? I suppose you will be calling me a freak the next thing I know.

COKE. Oh, impossible!

DOROTHY. Yes, you will.

COKE. Why, that would be horrible!

DOROTHY (*ignoring his reply*). Well, what did this freak do?

COKE (*ruefully*). She did me to the extent of about all I had.

DOROTHY. And what excuse have you to offer?

COKE. The very best in the world.

DOROTHY. And what is that?

COKE. She said that you sent her.

DOROTHY (*pleased*). Was that your reason for helping her?

COKE. Upon my honor, that was my sole reason.

DOROTHY. I suppose, under the circumstances, that I shall have to accept that excuse. Now that you have spent all your money, you must let me help you.

COKE. Couldn't think of it.

DOROTHY. But you must. I am responsible for all this.

COKE. You?

DOROTHY. Yes. I was that book-agent.

COKE (*amazed*). The deuce you were!

DOROTHY. And the Salvation Army lassie.

COKE. You don't mean it!

DOROTHY (*reproachfully*). And you never knew me!

COKE. What a thick-skulled chump I am, to be sure!

DOROTHY. You are. And you are not at all complimentary. According to you, I am plain,—awfully plain, almost homely —

COKE. But, believe me, I —

DOROTHY. And a freak, into the bargain.

COKE. But how was I to know?

DOROTHY. And such shocking language! Hot-cakes, you know.

COKE. Well, I said hot-cakes.

DOROTHY. Yes; but you nearly said ——

COKE. What?

DOROTHY. Well, you know.

COKE. I beg of you to forgive me. The book-agent was veiled and I could not see her face. If I had seen it, I should never have called it plain.

DOROTHY. Or awfully plain?

COKE. Nor awfully plain.

DOROTHY. Or almost homely?

COKE. Nor almost homely.

DOROTHY. Are you sure?

COKE. Positive.

DOROTHY. But the freak?

COKE. Well, I did not mean it. Will you forgive me?

DOROTHY. I shall try; and to prove my sincerity, I come this time with good news.

COKE. Yes?

DOROTHY. What would you say if I told you that I had secured for you the position of assistant solicitor for the Bluestone Steel Company?

COKE. I would say what I have always thought—that you are the only angel this side of heaven.

DOROTHY. That's putting it pretty strong; but we will dismiss all that as irrelevant, immaterial and impertinent—that is the phrase you lawyers use, isn't it? (*He nods.*) You know, father is a director in that company; and I have been requesting him for some time to give you a chance.

COKE. That was awfully good of you, Miss Dorothy.

DOROTHY (*ignoring the remark and going on with her story, as if no interruption had occurred*). So, as soon as a vacancy occurred, he had you appointed to the place; which pays its occupant three thousand a year.

COKE (*earnestly*). And you bring me the news, yourself?

DOROTHY. Yes.

COKE. Why?

DOROTHY (*confused*). I don't know. I thought maybe you—might prefer to learn of it in that way.

COKE (*coming close to her*). So I would, Miss Dorothy; so I would; and I cannot thank you enough for what you

have done. This gives me the right to say what has long been in my heart to tell you, but that poverty kept me silent. I love you. (*Putting his arm about her.*) Do you think that you could be happy with me?

DOROTHY (*dropping her head on COKE's shoulder with a little sigh*). I am willing to try.

(*Silence for a while.*)

COKE. Why did you come here disguised?

DOROTHY. I wanted to see what manner of man you were, when you did not have on your company manners.

COKE. And you found me pretty cross and unkind.

DOROTHY (*taking COKE by both hands and gazing into his eyes very earnestly*). Yes; just cross enough to help a poor girl whom you believed to be in distress; and unkind enough to give money to a Salvation Army recruit because I recommended her to call on you. (*Looking him over slowly.*) On the whole, I think you'll do.

COKE. I shall try my best.

CURTAIN

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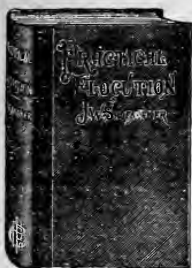
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